

Message Text

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CINCPAC

AMCONSUL BIEN HOA

AMCONSUL CAN THO

AMCONSUL DANANG

AMCONSUL NHA TRANG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 SAIGON 12913

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PINT, VS

SUBJ: ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT PROTEST ACTIVITY IN SOUTH VIETNAM IN
AREAS OUTSIDE OF SAIGON

ROME FOR AMB LODGE

SUMMARY:

1. THE EMB HAS RECEIVED SEVERAL REPORTS FROM CONGENS REGARDING
CURRENT PROTEST ACTIVITIES. THESE GATHERINGS HAVE BEEN MAINLY
ORGANIZED BY THE PEOPLE'S ANTI-CORRUPTION MOVEMENT (PACM). THE
NATIONAL RECONCILIATION FORCE (NRF) HAS ALSO ENGAGED IN ORGANIZA-
TIONAL ACTIVITY AND THERE HAS BEEN SOME ACTIVITY BY THE ANTI-HUNGER
FRONT IN MR-3. ALL POSTS AGREE THAT GOVT AUTHORITIES DO NOT
EXPECT WIDESPREAD PUBLIC DEMONSTRATIONS IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE.
THE POSSIBILITY OF RENEWED POLITICAL PROTEST EXISTS, HOWEVER,
SHOULD THE RELIGIOUS GROUPS DECIDE ON A MORE MILITANT POSTURE OR
THE GOVT BECOME EXCESSIVELY REPRESSIVE OR THE ECONOMIC SITUA-
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TION SIGNIFICANTLY DETERIORATE.

END SUMMARY.

2. CONGEN DANANG REPORTS THE SITUATION IN MR-1 REMAINS QUIET AND THERE APPEAR TO BE NO IMMEDIATE PROSPECTS OF DEMONSTRATIONS IN THE REGION BY EITHER THE CATHOLIC PACM OR ANY OF THE BUDDHIST-BACKED GROUPINGS, OF WHICH THE NRF HAS ATTRACTED THE MOST ATTENTION TO DATE. THIS ASSESSMENT IS BASED ON THE BELIEF THAT AT THIS POINT NONE OF THE REGIONAL POLITICAL FIGURES ATTRACTED TO THESE MOVEMENTS APPEAR INCLINED TO ATTEMPT TO ORGANIZE DEMONSTRATIONS. SHOULD OUTSIDERS SUCH AS PACM'S FATHER THANH RETURN TO THE SCENE, HOWEVER, DEMONSTRATIONS WOULD AGAIN BECOME A POSSIBILITY, ALTHOUGH WE CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THAT THEY WOULD ATTRACT ONLY LIMITED NUMBERS OF CATHOLICS.

3. ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIVITIES APPEAR TO BE UNDER WAY BY BOTH PACM AND THE NRF. THUS FAR TO OUR KNOWLEDGE NO CITY OR PROVINCE CHAPTERS HAVE BEEN FORMALLY ORGANIZED, AND EFFORTS TO DEVELOP EXECUTIVE COMMITTEES PROBABLY HAVE NOT GONE BEYOND THE TALK STAGE. BOTH CATHOLICS AND BUDDHISTS ARE INTERNALLY DIVIDED, WHICH RESTRICTS EFFECTIVE ACTION ON THEIR PART. NEITHER MOVEMENT HAS BROADENED ITS EXISTING AND, IN THE CASE OF THE CATHOLICS, AT LEAST, RATHER NARROW BASE OF SUPPORT IN THE REGION. THE CATHOLICS SUFFER FOR THEIR IDENTIFICATION WITH THE LATE NGO DINH DIEM, AND FATHER THANH'S CALL HERE FOR A RETURN TO THE SPIRIT OF DIEM HAS FALLEN ON DEAF BUDDHIST EARS. BY THE SAME TOKEN, BUDDHIST IDENTIFICATION WITH VIOLENT CONFRONTATION DECREASES THEIR ATTRACTION TO OTHER GROUPS UNWILLING TO RISK THE POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES. FOR THEIR PART, CENTRAL VIETNAMESE BUDDHISTS REMEMBER HOW THEY WERE DEFEATED IN THEIR 1966 STREET CONFRONTATION WITH THE GVN AND DO NOT SEEM EAGER TO REPEAT THAT EXPERIENCE. THEY ARE UNLIKELY TO RESORT TO THAT TACTIC AGAIN UNTIL THEY ARE REASONABLY CERTAIN THEY WILL COME OUT AHEAD IN SUCH A CLASH.

4. AN QUANG'S NRF WORRIES THE AUTHORITIES IN THIS REGION MORE BY FAR IN THE LONGER RUN THAN DOES THE CATHOLIC BASED PACM. ALL POLITICAL OBSERVERS TO WHOM WE HAVE SPOKEN HERE GIVE THE BUDDHISTS GREATER POTENTIAL FOR DISRUPTION THAN PACM OR CATHOLICS. AT PRESENT THERE ARE NO EXPECTATIONS OF COALITION BETWEEN THE CATHOLIC AND AN QUANG ACTIVISTS, BUT THE TWO GROUPS ARE TALKING

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WITH EACH OTHER AND THAT PROSPECT CANNOT BE COMPLETELY EXCLUDED. MANY OBSERVERS, INCLUDING DANANG'S MAYOR, BELIEVE THAT IF THESE TWO GROUPS COMBINED FORCES, PROVIDED THEY DO NOT RESORT TO EXTREME TACTICS, THEY COULD ACCOMPLISH SOMETHING GOOD FOR THE COUNTRY--I.E., HELP CLEANSE THE EXISTING GOVT STRUCTURE.

5. IT IS WIDELY BELIEVED THAT THE POLITICAL SITUATION IS LIKELY TO REMAIN ACTIVE HERE FROM NOW UNTIL THE 1975 ELECTIONS, CON-

TRASTING WITH THE LULL WHICH HAS PREVAILED FOR THE PAST YEAR. THE DIFFICULT ECONOMIC SITUATION IS MOST FREQUENTLY CITED AS THE PRIMARY REASON FOR THE ANTICIPATED INCREASE IN POLITICAL ACTIVISM. BECAUSE OF THIS, THE NEWLY FORMED PEOPLE'S FRONT AGAINST HUNGER COULD FIND FERTILE GROUND IN ECONOMICALLY STRAPPED MR-1, ALTHOUGH AS YET THERE HAS BEEN NO APPARENT ORGANIZING ACTIVITY WITH REGARD TO THIS MOVEMENT.

6. CONGEN NHA TRANG REPORTS ACTIVITY IN MR-2 OF THE PACM AND THE NRF HAS BEEN MINIMAL. THERE HAVE BEEN MEETINGS WITHIN CATHOLIC, AN QUANG, DAI VIET AND VNQDD GROUPS IN WHICH THE ISSUES WERE DISCUSSED AND THERE HAS BEEN SOME PRECAUTIONARY PLANNING WITHIN GVN OFFICIAL CIRCLES BUT, THUS FAR, NO DEMONSTRATIONS OR OTHER SIGNIFICANT MANIFESTATIONS OF WIDE SUPPORT FOR FATHER THANH'S MOVEMENT OR THE NFR HAVE TAKEN PLACE IN THIS REGION.

7. ON SEPT 11, EMISSARIES FROM FATHER THANH ARRIVED IN BINH DINH TO ORGANIZE "ANTI-CORRUPTION" DEMONSTRATIONS AMONG CATHOLIC GROUPS THERE. LOCAL DAI VIET ELEMENTS EXPRESSED INTEREST IN JOINING BUT ALL PLANS WERE CANCELED WHEN QUI NHON'S BISHOP CAC OPPOSED THEM. BISHOP CAC ALSO WAS INFLUENTIAL IN DISCOURAGING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PACM MOVEMENT IN PHU YEN PROVINCE. HOWEVER, THERE ARE STILL SOME PRIESTS THERE WHO FAVOR ACTION. MEANWHILE, THE PROVINCIAL GOVT HAS TOLD BUDDHISTS AND CATHOLICS TO CONFINE THEIR MEETINGS TO THEIR RESPECTIVE PAGODAS AND CHURCHES AND TO LIMIT THEIR ACTIVITIES TO RELIGION.

8. IN NHA TRANG CATHOLIC PRIESTS MET DURING THE WEEK OF SEPT 9 TO DISCUSS PLANS FOR CARRYING OUT THE DECLARATION OF THE 301 PRIESTS. REPORTEDLY, THE MEETING WAS DOMINATED BY CAUTIOUS COUNSEL AND NO DEMONSTRATIONS WERE PLANNED OR HELD. ALSO IN NHA TRANG, A GROUP OF AN QUANG BUDDHISTS MET ON SEPT 15 BUT, AGAIN, A CAUTIOUS LINE WAS FOLLOWED. ON SEPT 29, FATHER THANH AND SEVERAL OF

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HIS SUPPORTERS SPOKE TO A GROUP VARIOUSLY ESTIMATED TO NUMBER BETWEEN 500 AND 2000 PLUS AT THE REDEMPTIONIST CATHOLIC CHURCH IN NHA TRANG. THE MEETING WAS ORDERLY, CONFINED ITSELF TO THE CHURCH PREMISES, AND APPARENTLY DID NOT GENERATE MUCH LOCAL ENTHUSIASM. IN THE AFTERNOON OF THE 29TH, FATHER THANH AND HIS ENTourage MADE A SIMILAR PRESENTATION ON CHURCH PREMISES IN CAM RANH TO A GROUP OF ABOUT 500.

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INFO USDEL JEC PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

CINCPAC

AMCONSUL BIEN HOA

AMCONSUL CAN THO

AMCONSUL DANANG

AMCONSUL NHA TRANG

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9. IN PLEIKU, II CORPS COMMANDER, GEN TOAN, TOLD THE PROVINCE CHIEFS WHO WERE ASSEMBLED THERE SEPT 16 FOR A MONTHLY MEETING THAT THEY COULD EXPECT PACM MEETINGS IN THEIR PROVINCES IN THE NEAR FUTURE. HE REPORTEDLY CHARACTERIZED PACM AS AN ANTI-THIEU ORGANIZATION USING ANTI-CORRUPTION AS A COVER. MINISTER HOANG DUC NHA, DURING THE WEEK OF SEPT 23, ADDRESSED MORE THAN 1000 MEMBERS OF HIS PEOPLE'S MOTIVATION CADRE IN MR-2 WHO WERE ASSEMBLED IN NHA TRANG FOR THE PUARPOSE, AND INSTRUCTED THEM ON HOW TO RESPOND TO QUESTIONS CONCERNING CORRUPTION. REPORTEDLY HE ALSO RESPONDED TO CHARGES MADE AGAINST HIM AND MEMBERS OF HIS FAMILY. MINISTER NHA ALSO MET WITH MR-2'S PROVINCE CHIEFS ON OCT 2 TO BRIEF THEM ON HOW TO HANDLE THE ANTI-CORRUPTION MEVEMENT.

10. THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT CONSIDERABLE SYMPATHY EXISTS FOR THE AIMS OF THE PACM MOVEMENT IN MR-1. HOWEVER, THE LENGTHS TO WHICH FATHER THANH WENT IN HUE HAVE CAUSED A COUNTER-REACTION AMONG MANY WHO MIGHT HAVE SUPPORTED THE MOVEMENT IF IT HAD BEEN LAUNCHED WITH MORE RESTRAINT. GVN HAS EXERCISED RESTRAINT TOWARD
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ORDERLY MEETINGS AND IN MR-2 HAS RELIEVED THREE PROVINCE CHIEFS (BINH DINH, PHU YEN AND CAM RANH) WHO HAVE COME UNDER PUBLIC

CRITICISM FOR ALLEGED CORRUPTION AND ELECTION IRREGULARITIES. THE NRF MOVEMENT HAS, THUS FAR, BEEN EVEN MORE RESTRAINED THAN THE CATHOLICS IN MR-2. SUGGESTIONS THAT BUDDHISTS AND CATHOLICS MIGHT UNITE HAVE MET A VERY TEPID RESPONSE HERE AND SOME INSTANCES OF DAI VIET AND VNQDD GROUPS ATTEMPTING TO JOIN THE PACM HAVE BEEN RECEIVED WITH A SIMILAR LACK OF ENTHUSIASM. MR-2 IS NOT AN AREA WHICH TRADITIONALLY ORIGINATES POLITICAL ACTIVITY OF THIS NATURE NOR IS IT AN AREA WHICH HAS STRONG CATHOLIC OR BUDDHIST LEADERSHIP. HOWEVER, IF AN QUANG LEADERSHIP IN SAIGON SHOULD DECIDE ON A MORE MILITANT POSTURE OR IF THE GOVT SHOULD ATTEMPT TO REPRESS SUCH ACTIVITY, THI SITUATION COULD CHANGE. AS IT STANDS NOW, THE MOVEMENTS IN MR-2 DO NOT APPEAR TO HAVE STRONG LOCAL APPEAL.

11. CONGEN BIEN HOA REPORTS THERE HAS BEEN NO NOTICEABLE WIDE-SPREAD INCLINATION TO JOIN ACTIVELY IN PUBLIC PROTESTS, BUT THERE HAS BEEN AVID INTEREST IN FATHER THANH'S INDICTMENT NO. 1 AT ALL LEVELS IN MR-3. ITS CONTENTS WERE WIDELY KNOWN AND SUBJECT OF LIVELY DISCUSSIONS IN THE MWRKETS, IN THE COFFEE SHOPS, AND IN OFFICES EVEN BEFORE PRESS DISCLOSURES APPEARED.

12. THE 301 PRIESTS WHO WERE THE ORIGINL MEMBERS OF THE PACM INCLUDED SOME 55 PRIESTS IN MR-3 AND THE BISHOP OF XUAN LOC'S DIOCESE ENCOMPASSING BIEN HOA, LONG KHANH, PHUOC TUY AND VUNG TAU CONTAINS ONE OF SOUTH VIETNAM'S GREATEST CONCENTRATIONS OF CATHOLICS (36 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION). A NUMBER OF CATHOLIC LEADERS INCLUDING BISHOP LANG HAVE, HOWEVER, WORKED QUIETLY AGAINST PUBLIC DEMONSTRATIONS. THEY AND GVN OFFICIALS BELIEVE THERE WILL BE NO SUCH DEMONSTRATIONS IN THE NEAR FUTURE. BISHOP LANG IS AMONG THOSE WHO HAS CAUTIONED, HOWEVER, THAT THE SITUATION COULD CHANGE IF FATHER THANH'S MOVEMENT CATCHES ON ELSEWHERE. AN INTERESTING SIDE LIGHT IS THAT THE SENIOR CATHOLIC CHAPLAIN OF MR-3 AT MR-3 HQ WAS AMONG THE 301 PRIESTS. HE AND OTHERS IN MR-3 ARE MUCH EMBARRASSED BY THIS, AND HE IS NOW WORKING WITH GVN OFFICIALS TO DISCOURAGE DEMONSTRATIONS.

13. THERE ARE INDICATIONS THAT AN EFFORT IS BEING MADE, THUS FAR APPARENTLY WITH LITTLE SUCCESS, TO ORGANIZE CHAPTERS OF THE ANTI-HUNGER MOVEMENT IN MR-3. ALTHOUGH THE CAO DAI ARE APPARENTLY CONFIDENTIAL

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BEING WOODED BY THE PACM, THE BUDDHISTS, AND THE ANTI-HUNGER MOVEMENT, THEY ARE MAINTAINING A POSITION OF DETACHMENT AND ONE CAO DAI LEADER HAS PRIVATELY INFORMED THE CONGENS REP IN TAY NINH THAT THE CAO DAI DEFINITELY WILL NOT JOIN IN PROTEST ACTIVITIES AT THIS TIME.

14. CATHOLIC LEADERSHIP IN MR-3 IS URGING MODERATION ON PRIESTS AND DISCOURAGING DEMONSTRATIONS IN SUPPORT OF FATHER THANH'S PACM. THE BUDDHISTS AND OTHERS MANIFESTING INTEREST IN POLITICAL

PROTESTS SHOW NO SIGN YET OF OVERCOMING UNITY AND ORGANIZATIONAL PROBLEMS. THE PEOPLE ARE, HOWEVER, FOLLOWING THE ANTI-CORRUPTION MOVEMENT WITH WIDESPREAD INTEREST. CATHOLIC AND GVN LEADERS DO NOT EXPECT PUBLIC DEMONSTRATIONS IN MR-3 IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE. IN THE CURRENT ENVIRONMENT OF SECURITY AND ECONOMIC UNEASE, HOWEVER, THE POSSIBILITY OF POLITICAL PROTEST ACTIVITY EXISTS IF PROTEST MOVEMENTS SPREAD OR PERSIST IN OTHER AREAS.

15. CAN THO CONGEN REPORTS GVN OFFICIALS AT REGION AND PROVINCE LEVEL CALM TO BE UNCONCERNED ABOUT POSSIBLE PACM ACTIVITY IN CANTHO AND ELSEWHERE IN THE DELTA. CONTACTS INDICATE THAT LOCAL CATHOLICS ARE PREPARED FOR PUBLIC MEETINGS OR DEMONSTRATIONS AND THAT SOME PRIESTS ARE STRONGLY COMMITTED TO THE MOVEMENT.

16. EFFORTS APPARENTLY ARE UNDERWAY IN MR-4 TO ENLIST SUPPORT FOR PACM BUT GVN AUTHORITIES BELIEVE MAJORITY OF LOCAL CATHOLIC CLERGY WILL GIVE NO MORE THAN TOKEN SUPPORT TO A MOVEMENT WHICH THEY VIEW AS ESSENTIALLY NORTHERN AND DAI VIET LED. CAN THO BISHOP IS REPORTEDLY NEITHER SUPPORTING NOR DISCOURAGING ACTIVIST PRIESTS, BUT HAS TOLD THEM HE WILL BACK THEM UP IN CASE OF A CONFRONTATION WITH GOVT AUTHORITIES.

17. THERE IS SOME POSSIBILITY OF PARTICIPATION BY OTHER RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN DEMONSTRATIONS OR PUBLIC MEETINGS. ALTHOUGH NEITHER HOA HAO NOR CAO DAI ARE PREPARED TO TAKE THE LEAD, ONE INFLUENTIAL ACTIVIST PRIEST REPORTS REPS FROM BOTH GROUPS HAD EXPRESSED TO HIM THEIR WILLINGNESS TO COOPERATE WITH CATHOLIC-LED ACTIVITY. A LOCAL GVN OFFICIAL WITH GOOD CATHOLIC CONTACTS HAS SAID THAT SOME OF THE PRIESTS HAD TRIED TO ENLIST THE AID OF THE UNITED BUDDHIST CONGREGATION BUT THAT THE LOCAL REP HAD DECLINED ON THE GROUNDS HE HAD RECEIVED "NO INSTRUCTIONS TO COOPERATE WITH CONFIDENTIAL

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OTHER RELIGIOUS GROUPS". RELIABLE AN QUANG SOURCES INDICATE SUCH COOPERATION UNLIKELY TO DEVELOP.

18. ANOTHER GVN SOURCE EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT PROTEST MOVEMENTS POSED SIGNIFICANT NATIONAL CHALLENGE TO GVN WHICH COULD NOT BE IGNORED OR DEALT WITH BY HARSH POLICE ACTION. SAID GVN MUST DEAL WITH PACM LEADERS HONESTLY AND OPENLY. SHOULD MOVEMENT CONTINUE IN ITS CRITICISM WITHOUT EFFECTIVE GVN RESPONSE, ARVN MORALE WOULD CERTAINLY BE HARMED.
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